

# VR

## IMAGES *of Success*

2006-2007 Annual Report

North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services





# **I M A G E S *of Success***

2006-2007 Annual Report  
North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services



Dustin Estabrook  
Wilmington

## VR in Fiscal Year 2006-2007:

In fiscal year 2006-2007, the North Carolina Division of Rehabilitation Services – fueled by an organizational change initiative begun three years before – made steady progress in a number of areas.

The agency's value as a resource for employment opportunities increased. Helping produce that result was a two-year Department of Labor grant. The grant assisted VR and its partners by strengthening their roles as providers of workplace opportunities and continuing an emphasis on the dual-customer approach that intensifies VR's relationships with potential employers.

Toward more effective allocation of resources, the agency undertook a review of: how it currently uses resources, what additional resources are needed, and how the agency will provide those resources. One result was the addition of 60 paid interns, of whom 22 have now been hired as permanent staff.

Steps were taken to strengthen relationships with stakeholders, who are often important sources of referrals for VR services. The agency has begun an intensive look at how it can better manage referrals by: carefully tracking the sources of referrals, determining the related percentages of case closures, and identifying sources of referrals who might be better served by other agencies.

Progress toward fostering a more performance-oriented culture was marked by: reinforcing the manager's role in supporting performance, re-emphasizing training/development opportunities, creating a casework advisor position to offer case review and mentoring to counselors, and examining the effect of policy on performance and minimizing unnecessary constraints.

The agency's understanding of consumers' needs gained ground as it looked more closely at how to better mold its services for the individuals it serves. A multicultural competency workgroup has begun to examine how the agency can accommodate a diversity of needs with its continuum of services.

While much work remains, the progress of the past year brought VR closer to its vision of a North Carolina where people with disabilities will live and work in the communities and jobs of their choice.

## The Year by the Numbers

- VR services helped 6,271 North Carolinians achieve successful employment outcomes.
- Independent living objectives were achieved by 2,066 Independent Living program participants.
- Assistive Technology provided 2,682 individuals with information and assistance services.
- Disability Determination closed 173,281 cases involving Social Security disability, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid disability benefits.

## Director's Message

Last year, our division established six key areas where we wanted to focus our vision and our energies during the year. (Note: Because the lion's share of our funding is federal, our annual report for this and subsequent years will reflect the *federal* fiscal year, abbreviated "FFY." FFY 2007 began October 1, 2006 and ended September 30, 2007.)

We wanted to effectively reposition VR as an employment program designed to help people with disabilities obtain and keep jobs; to understand the employment-related needs of people with disabilities and determine if meaningful differences can be identified for some segments of consumers; and to strategically allocate and align all our resources, including staff and technology.



Linda Harrington  
Director  
N.C. Division of Vocational  
Rehabilitation Services

We also set out to more effectively manage key relationships with key stakeholders including referral sources, vendors, and community rehabilitation programs; to establish a more performance-oriented culture that assists people with disabilities to obtain and keep jobs; and to become known for the value that NCDVRS creates for the disability community and beyond.

In the preceding article, you can see that we made progress in all of these areas – and we intend to improve on that record.

Last year was also the second year of our renewed emphasis on the dual-customer approach. Our staff intensified VR's relationships with business and, in so doing, better positioned VR as a premier resource for employers on disability issues. With dual-customer pilot projects in Charlotte, Goldsboro, Hickory, Pinehurst, Raleigh and Washington, we've made huge strides in building alliances with businesses, local chambers of commerce, JobLink Centers, and other organizations.

This report is intended to reflect not only what we've done but also who we are. That's why we've entitled our report "Images of Success." The title may sound a little self-serving but, in truth, VR is only as successful as those we serve – whether it's a person with a disability, an employer who needs qualified employees, or someone who, with appropriate services, can live independently.



## Evaluation and Counseling

VR provides services to people with disabilities to assist them in getting or keeping a job. Rehabilitation begins with an assessment of the consumer's strengths, skills and experience. Jointly developed by the consumer and counselor, each individual's plan for employment is carefully monitored and, if needed, adjustments are made. Plans may include: diagnostic services; physical and mental restoration; assistive technology; transportation; modifications to vehicle, home, job and worksite; and others.



Wayne Fipps  
Wilmington

Among consumers who completed their rehabilitation plans in FFY 2007, VR provided:

- *Assessment services to 13,218 individuals.*
- *Diagnosis and treatment of impairments to 6,350.*
- *Counseling and guidance to 4,912.*

Categories of services offered beyond the assessment stage include: employment, rehabilitation technology, training, and personal assistance.

## Benefits Counseling

In North Carolina, the federal Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach initiative operates under the name Making Employment a New Success (MEANS). Program specialists offer counseling to recipients of Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance to help them understand how going to work often has a less-than-feared effect on their benefits payments. For recipients of traditional VR services, the counseling has helped remove disincentives to seek employment.

- *VR's MEANS program has served more than 6,862 Social Security beneficiaries since the program's inception in 2000.*
- *The program is joined by similar initiatives under Easter Seals UCP, Life Plan Trust and Tri-County Industries to offer benefits planning assistance throughout North Carolina.*



# Deaf/Hard of Hearing

VR provides services to individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or late-deafened to assist them in preparing for, getting, or maintaining employment. Counselors work with consumers to help them make

informed choices about their job goals and what, among a range of specialized services and equipment, is needed to help meet those goals. Located in 12 of VR’s local offices, specially trained counselors assist citizens with hearing loss across North Carolina. In FFY 2007 VR:



Kao Vang  
Morganton

- *Provided services to 2,028 consumers with hearing loss.*
- *Assisted 357 consumers with hearing loss achieve successful employment outcomes.*
- *Continued to equip local offices with advanced technology to improve consumers’ access to services and their employment outcomes.*

# School-to-Life Services

VR has partnered with local schools across the state to assist students in making a successful transition from their school life to jobs and careers. Services are designed to assist individuals with disabilities – physical, mental or learning-related – who require assistance to prepare for, locate, or maintain employment compatible with their interests, skills and potential. For eligible students, VR offers vocational guidance and assistance with training, job placement, and other services. Referrals may be made by a parent, teacher, social worker, guidance counselor or nurse, or an individual may refer himself or herself.

- *In FFY 2007, VR served 16,237 youth, 22 and under, with disabilities.*
- *VR counselors provided services to 9,068 high school students in 345 high schools in the state.*



# Employment Services

Getting or keeping a job is the main goal of the partnership between the consumer and VR. The process begins with evaluation of the consumer's interests, abilities and aptitudes for different kinds of jobs. The employment plan may include college or vocational training, on-the-job training, job coaching, or supported employment. VR staff often provide information on résumé preparation, interviewing, developing job leads, and assistance in locating a job. After employment, the VR counselor and consumer stay in contact to help make sure the job is a good match.



Buren Harrelson  
Leland

- *In FFY 2007, VR assisted 6,271 North Carolinians in achieving successful employment outcomes.*
- *Consumers' weekly earnings before receiving services averaged \$42. After employment, the average – reflecting a range of earning levels and full- and part-time jobs – increased to \$292.*
- *Individuals employed after receiving VR services earned a combined total of \$1.8 million per week.*

## “Dual Customers”: VR Serves Employers and Prospective Employees

Ten years ago, Pam Lewis' leg required amputation after a four-wheeler accident.

The high school student felt discouraged about a career, so she and her mom began to meet with VR Counselor Ken Query. He remembers that Pam exhibited an interest in medical, particularly veterinary, work but all three realized that pursuing that goal would be grueling.

After high school graduation, VR assisted Pam in attending Central Carolina Community College. With degree in hand, she took the state exam for veterinary technicians — and passed.



But college and exam preparation had left Pam feeling drained, and vet tech jobs in her rural Montgomery County were scarce. That's when VR stepped back in.

Business Relations Representative Thelma Cox worked with Pam on résumé development and networking skills and visited every veterinary clinic in several nearby counties. Pam would follow up on her leads.



Pam Lewis  
Montgomery County

Meanwhile, veterinarian Dr. Joanna Tysor had a need at her Siler City clinic. “Good veterinary technicians are hard to come by,” says Tysor. So when Pam contacted her, she was interested — but skeptical that a tech with a physical limitation could do the job. She agreed to a one-week trial and, when that went well, welcomed Pam as a new employee.

That was in March 2006. Today, employer and employee are happy with the decision.

“Pam’s a hard worker, reliable and organized,” says Tysor. “We’ve all learned how to work together” including co-workers assisting Pam with lifting animals when needed — at least until she gets used to a new prosthetic leg that VR has provided.

But whatever the challenge, Pam concludes: “You’ve just got to figure out a way to get over it.”

## Services to Employers



Edward Gaines  
Raleigh

Crucial to VR’s mission are North Carolina’s businesses who each year hire thousands of individuals served by VR. Because each of our referrals is screened, employers can feel more confident they’re a good prospect for their company, and they benefit from services like customized follow-up and on-the-job training that can help make sure the new employee remains a good match for the job. For more than 80 years, VR has been the state’s premier resource on issues related to disabilities in the workplace.



- *Screening, job-matching and training can reduce employers' recruitment time and costs.*
- *Employers can benefit from on-site consultations by professionals like our rehabilitation engineers who help ensure that the physical workplace is a good fit for the new employee.*
- *Employers can benefit from these services at no cost. They may also enjoy tax incentives for hiring a VR referral.*

## Community Rehabilitation

VR is able to extend its services for people with disabilities through programmatic partnerships with dozens of community rehabilitation programs across the state. These programs are equipped to offer a range of job-placement and support services to VR consumers with specialized needs. Community rehabilitation services include: vocational evaluation; job development; job coaching; individual or group supported employment; and work adjustment activities designed to help individuals improve work skills, work behaviors, and emotional/physical tolerances for a range of jobs.

- *VR directly administers two community rehabilitation programs — in Goldsboro and Morganton — serving individuals in eastern and western North Carolina.*
- *In FFY 2007, 8,686 consumers received services from a community rehabilitation program.*
- *Of that number, 2,284 achieved their employment objectives and many others continued to make progress toward theirs.*

## Supported Employment



April McNeill  
Wilmington

VR consumers find themselves at many different stages in the type of jobs they prefer, the skills they offer, and their readiness for work. Many consumers benefit from more intensive support services in becoming acclimated to new employment or in remaining on the job. After placement, supported employment can mean job training at the worksite for as long as needed or a job coach



to assist the employee on a longer-term basis — perhaps with daily, weekly or intermittent visits.

- *In FFY 2007, 3,496 consumers received supported employment services.*
- *Of that number, 1,099 achieved their employment objectives and many others continued to progress toward theirs.*
- *Supported employment services may be supplemented by or directly provided by a local, VR-approved community rehabilitation program.*

## Independent Living



Marian Braswell  
Rocky Mount

Independence can often mean living in the home and community of choice. To help its consumers achieve that end, the Independent Living program offers evaluation and counseling, vehicle modifications, peer counseling and advocacy, rehabilitation engineering, prosthetics and orthotics, personal assistance services, recreational therapy, and assistance with leisure activities. Independent living counselors and program participants jointly plan how to achieve a viable, cost-effective alternative to institutional living.

- *In FFY 2007, the Independent Living program assisted 5,164 individuals.*
- *Independent Living Plans of Services were completed by 2,066 program participants.*
- *Of that number, 388 individuals were either transitioned out of nursing facilities or were able to avoid going into a facility.*
- *Personal care services were provided to 366 individuals at an average cost of \$9,776 per year.*

## Rehabilitation Engineering

With technology and a commitment to creative problem-solving, VR's rehabilitation engineers help consumers overcome physical barriers in a number of areas, including education, transportation,



employment, independent living and recreation. Services can cover: adaptive computer access; augmentative communication; seating/mobility; and home, vehicle, and worksite modifications. Engineers often consult with employers to assist in removing architectural barriers so that new employees with disabilities or current employees who've acquired disabilities may be accommodated.

- *In FFY 2007, 1,213 barrier removal projects at consumers' residences were completed.*
- *During the same period, vehicle modification projects were completed for 158 consumers.*
- *Rehabilitation engineering projects completed for consumers exceeded \$5.2 million in cost.*

## Assistive Technology

For people of all ages and disabilities, assistive technology devices can make everyday living more independent. Offering access in all 100



Debra Huck  
Kenly

counties, VR's Assistive Technology (AT) staff demonstrate how assistive technology can improve computer use, daily living activities, mobility, communication, education, leisure, alarm systems, and environmental controls. AT offers short-term loans for trying out devices, information/referral, rights advocacy for individuals and families, and financial resource information. During the state fiscal year – July 2006 through June 2007– the Assistive Technology Program:

- *Provided 2,682 individuals with consultation and information services.*
- *Made 5,409 equipment loans and conducted 964 demonstrations.*
- *Conducted 503 training/awareness seminars for 14,616 attendees*
- *Sponsored the sixteenth annual Assistive Technology Expo with 1,200 attendees.*

## Disability Determination

Under an agreement with the Social Security Administration, Disability Determination Services receives applications from SSA offices across the state and adjudicates Social Security disability and Supplemental Security Income disability payments. Disability Determination Services performs the same function with Medicaid claims received from the state's county departments of social services.

- *In FFY 2007, DDS closed 173,281 cases involving Social Security disability, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid disability benefits.*
- *The average time for processing cases – from receipt to closure – was 78 days.*

## Client Assistance Program (CAP)

The Client Assistance Program is a federally funded program that serves anyone seeking information, applying for services or receiving services from agencies receiving federal monies under the Rehabilitation Act. These include the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Division of Services for the Blind, the independent living rehabilitation programs within those divisions, and the state's centers for independent living. Services include bridging gaps that may occur in accessing rehabilitation services, assisting with the appeals process and providing information and referral.

- *In FFY 2007, the Client Assistance Program provided information and referral to 943 individuals, and*
- *Provided outreach to 8,625 individuals in traditionally unserved or underserved populations.*

## VR "All-Stars"

In 2007, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services honored staff members in Boone, Forest City and Wilmington with its sixth statewide "VR All-Star Awards." The three were chosen from nine recipients of VR's regional "Superstar Awards."



Connie Barnette



Jackie Godlock



Rachel Towns

Employee volunteers manage the awards program in which agency staff nominate and vote on their co-workers.

- **Leadership** — *Connie Barnette, manager of the agency's Boone office, received the award for outstanding achievement in leadership. The award praises Barnette for leading "by example, encouragement and plain hard work" and exhibiting "genuine caring with consumers and staff." It also cited her ability to handle even the most difficult situations with "professionalism, fairness and discretion."*
- **Customer Service** — *Jackie Godlock, a business relations representative in the agency's Forest City office, was cited for her customer service. The award notes that "she always puts the needs of her consumers as a top priority, always looking for ways to serve them more effectively and efficiently. She constantly performs duties outside her job description in order to help others."*
- **Creativity** — *Rachel Towns, a counselor in the agency's Wilmington office, was honored for her creativity. The award cites her efforts to make agency services better known in the community. She is a frequent guest on a locally televised talk show and has been a guest on "The Morning Beat," a local radio talk show, along with former consumers of agency services.*

Director Linda Harrington thanked the honorees and congratulated them "on achieving the greatest honor this agency bestows.... With this highest statewide recognition, you have been honored by your co-workers as 'the best of the best.'"

Health and Human Services Secretary Dempsey Benton also congratulated the recipients, noting that "the work of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is an integral, important part of the department's mission to serve the people of North Carolina, most especially those with disabilities. The contributions for which you've been recognized is indispensable in carrying out that work."

# North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Data Summary: Federal Fiscal Year  
2006 - 2007

## Statewide Overview: Vocational Rehabilitation Services

<b>Consumers Served in FFY 2007</b>		<b>47,620</b>
Consumers in process of developing an Individualized Plan of Employment as of September 30, 2007, the last day of the FFY		4,208
<b>Consumers Served through Individualized Plans of Employment</b>		<b>38,370</b>
Consumers receiving services as of the last day of the FFY		25,096
Successful employment outcomes		6,271

## Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers by Disability

<b>Primary Disability</b>	<b>Eligible Served</b>	<b>Column Percent</b>
Sensory/Communicative	2,192	4.6%
Physical	14,932	31.4%
Cognitive	14,979	31.5%
Mental Illness	9,944	20.9%
Other Mental Disabilities	5,549	11.7%
Major Impairment not yet recorded	24	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,620</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Earnings for Consumers with Successful Employment Outcomes

<b>Average Earnings</b>	<b>Weekly Earnings</b>	<b>Monthly Earnings</b>	<b>Annual Earnings</b>
At Case Opening	\$42.13	\$182.56	\$2,190.76
At Case Closure	\$291.87	\$1,264.77	\$15,177.24
Average Increase	\$249.74	\$1,082.21	\$12,986.48
<b>Total Increase</b>	<b>\$1,560,845</b>	<b>\$6,763,662</b>	<b>\$81,163,940</b>

## Supported Employment and Work Adjustment Services

<b>Supported Employment</b>			<b>Work Adjustment/ Job Coaching</b>		
<b>Region</b>	<b>Consumers Served</b>	<b>Successful Outcomes</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Consumers Served</b>	<b>Successful Outcomes</b>
Western	1,007	324	Western	1,641	365
Central	1,531	476	Central	2,154	478
Eastern	958	299	Eastern	1,395	342
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,496</b>	<b>1,099</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,190</b>	<b>1,185</b>

## Statewide Overview: Independent Living Rehabilitation Program

<b>Consumers Served in FFY 2007</b>		<b>5,164</b>
Consumers receiving services as of the last day of the FFY		2,476
<b>Independent Living Plans of Services Completed</b>		<b>2,066</b>
Number of individuals transitioned out of nursing homes or able to avoid going into a nursing home		388
<b>Individuals Receiving Personal Assistance Services</b>		<b>366</b>
Average per person cost for personal assistance services		\$9,776

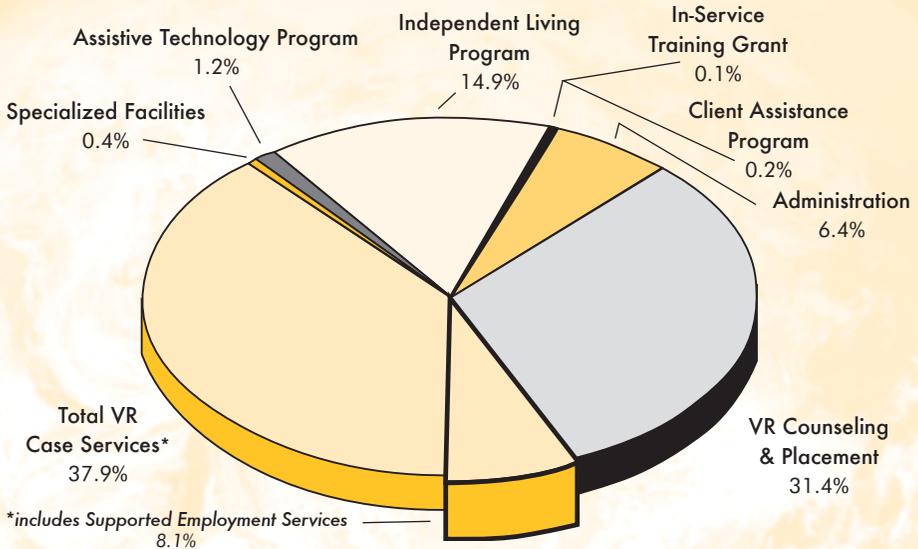
## NC Assistive Technology Services Overview\*

Number Receiving Assistive Technology Services	8,669
Equipment Loans	5,409
Number Receiving Information and Assistance Services	2,682
Number at Training and Awareness Seminars	14,616
Attendees at the "Sixteenth Annual Assistive Technology Expo"	1,200
*For period July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007	

## NC Disability Determination Services Overview

Cases Received	175,408
Number of Cases Closed	173,281
Average Time: Receipt to Closure — SSDI/SSI	78 days
Performance/Accuracy Rate — SSDI/SSI	94.4%

## Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services FFY 2007 Program Expenditures



Administration \$7,817,117	Independent Living Program \$18,207,053
Total VR Case Services \$46,443,556	In-Service Training Grant \$142,261
Supported Employment Services \$9,190,361	Client Assistance Program \$306,135
Specialized Facilities \$519,504	VR Counseling & Placement \$38,477,118
Assisted Technology Program \$1,488,004	

## State Rehabilitation Council

Michael Maybee – Chair  
Kacie Blalock – Chair-Elect  
Janet Schanzenbach –  
Immed. Past Chair  
Jean M. Wolff-Rossi  
Cathy Hansen  
Kathy Brack  
Ken Gregory  
Carolyn Walker  
Richard Crews  
Mary LaCorte  
Mark Ezzell  
Bobbie Grammer  
Horace Hunt  
Darryl Jackson  
Karen Moye-Stallings

**Ex Officio:**

Linda Harrington, Director  
Keith Renner

## State Independent Living Council

Jean M/ Wolff-Rossi – Chair  
Michael Martin – Vice-Chair  
Darla Sykes-Bates  
Robert Thompson  
Ruth Haines  
Clyde S. Goodwin  
Barbara Davis  
Lucy Wong-Hernandez  
Jeff McCloud  
Kelly R. Rowe  
Phillip Woodward  
James H. Wells  
Stacey Milbern  
Darlene Wetzel  
Dorothy Frye  
Rene E. Cummins  
Dennis Troy  
Rebecca Williford

**Ex Officio:**

Mark Urban  
Samuel Teruel-Velez  
Cynthia Speight  
Mark Whisenant  
Gregory Best

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## **N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

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State of North Carolina | Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Department of Health and Human Services | Dempsey Benton, Secretary  
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